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Author
Rosch, E

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The Grinch Who Stole Wisdom

Eleanor Rosch

Department of Psychology

University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

Contemplative wisdom offers a different orientation to what personal wisdom is, how to develop it, and how to use it in the world than is presently contained in our popular culture, our sciences, or the field called wisdom studies. I illustrate this by showing parallels between the historical development of contemplative paths in Buddhism and the narrative development of the great Dr. Seuss children's fable *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Both diverge markedly from our educational expectations for wisdom. The second part of the chapter outlines the difficulties of doing traditional scientific research on this kind of material; in particular, it presents a critique of the research that purports to study Buddhist derived mindfulness.

> “Every *Who* down in *Who*-ville, the tall and the small,
> Was singing! Without any presents at all!” (Seuss, 1957, unpaginated)

Dr. Seuss is wise. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* could serve as a parable for our time. It can also be seen as a roadmap for the development of contemplative wisdom. From the point of view of contemplatives in any of the world’s philosophies or religions, people are confused about wisdom. The content of the nascent field of wisdom studies, they might say, is largely not wisdom at all but rather what it's like to live in a particular kind of prison cell, a well appointed cell perhaps, but not a place that makes possible either personal satisfaction or deep problem solving. I believe that what the contemplative traditions have to say is important; they offer a different orientation to what personal wisdom is, how to develop it, and how to use it in the world than is presently contained in either our popular culture or our sciences. In order to illustrate this I will examine, in some detail, one contemplative path within Buddhism. Buddhism is particularly useful in this respect because its practices are nontheistic and thus avoid many of the cultural landmines associated with the contemplative aspects of Western religions.

Why focus on the contemplative traditions? Our world is in deep trouble as is amply argued in Nicholas Maxwell’s passionate chapter in this volume. This despite the fact that individual people can be well

meaning and strive hard to do what they see as good and necessary at any given moment. They form bonds with each other, try to figure out causal relationships from the earliest age, make great efforts to support their families and nurture their children, help one another more than not, strive to get better at what they do, and look for meaning in their lives. Yet all such problem solving seems only to result in social "blowback" as crisis succeeds crisis. Is there another way to look at pressing issues besides advocating more of the same kind of problem solving? For this we need to step back and take a fresh look from outside of the prison, and it is the contemplative traditions that purport to do just that.

How? Einstein once said that problems could never be solved by the same minds that created them. Much of Buddhism consists of developing a new mind or, in later Buddhism, of finding one's original mind. Starting with early Buddhism, I will describe the psychological aspects of how humans become ensnared and the evolution of teachings on how they can get out.

What is the Prison?

We start with where we are, not with ideals. Dr. Seuss' children's tale begins on Christmas Eve with the Grinch gnashing his teeth as he gazes down at *Who*-ville, not liking what he sees or how he feels.

The first word of teaching the Buddha is said to have uttered is *dukkha* which means *suffering* or *unsatisfactoriness*. Suffering is also

the first of what are called the Four Noble Truths. Notice: suffering is considered a basic truth and a noble one, quite a different attitude toward suffering than is the norm in our society. It can also be a puzzling first truth to Westerners. While we readily understand how people will suffer when they don't get what they want or do get what they don't want, the iconic image of the life of the Buddha (now reasonably well known courtesy of Hollywood) is of someone who had absolutely everything one can imagine wanting and yet was still discontent, in fact discontent enough to leave his palace and begin his journey. (For more material on the early Buddhism to be covered in this section see Buddhaghosa, 1976; Byrom, 1976; Kornfield, 1977; Nyaponika, 1973; Rahula, 1959; Rosch, 2010; Trungpa, 1976)

How can getting what one wants still be suffering? To see this requires looking closely at one's experience, something that people do not ordinarily do, in fact may actively avoid. Hence in early Buddhism there were sequences of meditation practices aimed first at calming and stabilizing the mind and later at directing awareness toward moment-to-moment mental functioning in order to develop insight into its nature. (At present in the West all such practices tend to be lumped together under the label *mindfulness.*) And what were the insights that were to be developed? Some of the first discoveries of insight are called the Three Marks of Existence. They are:

Mark 1: Impermanence

We may think we already know about it. “You’re going to die;” say all religions. Poets notice too: “leaves fall,” “maidens wither.” And, of course, *change* is something on everyone’s mind, wanting it or fearing it. In Buddhism such things are called *gross impermanence*, and while important (one traditional exercise was contemplation of corpses), insight practices were aimed at a subtler form of noticing. Fundamental impermanence, the appreciation of which can change consciousness, was understood to be the moment-to-moment arising and falling, birth and death, of perceptions and thoughts themselves.

Mark 2: Egolessness

First of all, *ego* in this context does not mean the ego strengths and weaknesses important in clinical psychology. Buddhism was well aware of the integrity and resilience now attributed to a healthy ego in the West and discusses these virtues under other names such as wholesome habits and wisdom attributes. Egolessness is also not the same as the constructs that replace the idea of a real self in cognitive psychology and cognitive science; for example, self-schemas, supervisory structures, and brain states. After all, who is it that is comfortably discoursing on self-schemas and brain states?

What the early Buddhist teaching of egolessness is pointing towards is that when one closely observes moment-to-moment experience, one’s self is seen to not have the solidity and continuity that we imagine. And yet this fantasy self can also be clearly seen as

the source of one's motivations, emotions, and actions. How come?

One answer is given in the teaching of the Five *Skandas* (heaps). (1) Form (*rupa*): We have a body and its senses. Those senses are dualistic; for example, right now when you are looking at these words, there is a subtle sense of a *you* as subject reading the words as object. In this respect, the mind is also a sense; that is, there is the feeling of me as subject experiencing my thoughts and emotions as object. (2) Feeling (*vedana*): Given that we have a body and mind, we also have feelings with positive, negative, and neutral valences. Such feelings become tied to that primitive sense of me as subject. (3) Perception/Impulse (*samjna*): Thus when perception of external and internal objects occurs, it is through the screen of those feelings. Such perception gives rise to impulses to get the positive, not get the negative, and ignore the (irrelevant to Me) neutral. (4) Formation/Concept/Habit (*samskara*): Action follows impulse producing habits. (5) Consciousness (*vijnana*): The outcome is a form of consciousness that consists of self-perpetuating states (whole realms) of desire, grasping, greed and passion for the positive; fear, anger, hatred, and aggression toward the negative; and indifference and ignoring toward the neutral. Atop it all is ignorance of the way the whole system works and, importantly, of its alternatives.

The result is that as long as we are living from grasping/passion, fear/aggression, and ignorance (called the Three Poisons), we will be

trapped within these states of consciousness, cycling endlessly between them. This is the prison. The whole process is called *samsara* and is represented in the iconography of the Wheel of Life shown in Figure 1 (Insert Figure 1 about here). Traditionally, the realms were viewed as actual places into which a sentient being could be born from one lifetime to another as well as states of mind through which one cycled during a single lifetime. Among Westerners, not surprisingly, it is the latter interpretation that draws most interest and credence.

In the iconography of the realms there are six basic forms, a lower and an upper realm for each of the three poisons (for a more complete account of the realms than is provided here, see Trungpa, 1976; Rosch, 2010). The lower (most painful) realms of aggression are hellish states, both hot hells resembling Christian imagery of hell, and icy cold hells of frozen anger, bitterness, and withdrawal. The lower realm of passion (called the hungry ghost realm) is a state of greed and poverty mentality so extreme that the hungry ghosts (*pretas*) are pictured as creatures with enormous bellies but throats so constricted that they cannot actually swallow any of the sustenance they crave and amass. The lower realm of ignorance (animal realm) consists of states of dullness: just putting one foot ahead of the other, survival without imagination or humor. The upper realms are less painful but equally fraught and, with one potential exception, equally trapped. The upper realm of aggression (jealous gods realm) is a state of comparison,

paranoia, and competition, and the upper realm of ignorance (god realm) is a temporarily pleasurable abode brought about by drugs or a bloated ego, from both of which one is going to crash. The best state to be in is human realm, the upper realm of passion, an intelligently desirous state (more about human realm shortly).

Why is samsara a prison; why can't one just walk out? One reason is that each state reinforces and perpetuates itself. You can notice this by paying attention at your next meal. Even if that first bite is as delicious as anticipated, the pleasure is short lived, and one only wants more. Research has, in fact, shown that the maximal reward both for mice and humans is in proximal anticipation not in consumption (Knutson & Greer, 2008). A second reason is that, as long as one is operating within the mind set of *samsara*, there is no place to go except to another of these states. Let's trace out an example: after gaining more and more of something desired, you get so frustrated by never being fully satisfied that you get angry. Now you're in a state of aggression. You act aggressively to get rid of the painful anger, but that doesn't satisfy because it makes you feel more, not less, angry. It also riles up everyone around you so that now they're attacking you, and you have to keep fighting. The dissatisfaction of living in aggression builds until, perhaps, you just don't care anymore and withdraw into indifference and ignorance. You stay in that cut-off state until either a desire surfaces from the inside or a seduction from the

outside -- and then off you go again as the wheel of life turns.

Mark 3: Suffering

The result of all this is suffering. While the ills, disappointments, tragedies, and pains of body and mind need no introduction, what the close observation of an insightful mind discovers is that all experiences, all moments of consciousness in samsara, are marked by suffering. Grasping for the permanence of what is impermanent leads to suffering. Grasping for a solid self that will be a safe landing platform for experience where there is none leads to suffering. Obtaining something one wants only feeds further desire, and vanquishing an object of hatred fuels further aggression. Ignoring is beset by uneasiness. Even simple pleasures can be seen to be a form of grasping at fleeting and not all that satisfying straws in the wind.

The one potential bright spot in all of this is human realm. Only in a human frame of mind might one glimpse the inconspicuous prison door with the exit sign above it. Humans are intelligent enough to see that what they are doing doesn't quite work. They may respond first by seeking better objects (a better coat, health, job, spouse, religion, scientific theory…) and better ways to get the objects. They can have high ideals and strive to emulate great people. They invent logics and sciences, weave networks of concepts and build models. They even have the concept of *wisdom* and when asked about it, what do they say? They describe someone who is in a human realm state of mind

because that is the best and also the limit of what they know. But according to Buddhism and other contemplative paths, this kind of mind is the beginning, not the end of the path.

How to Get Out of the Prison

In Early Buddhism (Theravada: the Speech of the Elders)

> Then he got an idea!
> An awful idea!
> The Grinch
> Got a wonderful, awful idea! (Seuss, 1957, unpaginated)

It is close observation of experience that has revealed the prison, and, in the earliest Buddhism, it is this kind of increasingly insightful observation that leads the way out. The chains of cause and effect that keep a person bound are called *karma* which operates not just between lives (a teaching on which Westerns are largely agnostic) but within a given life where it can be observed (hit someone, they hit you back; eat one potato chip, eat another). The technical description of such causality (in psychological language, the description of a habit) is a circular chain with 12 interdependent links (*pratityasamutpada* -- co-dependent origination). The reason why these chains are so hard to break is that by the time one realizes what one is doing (e.g. eating another potato chip), the conditions for doing so have already happened unnoticed. With strong intention and a stably observant mind, one can start to notice what is happening early enough in the chain to interrupt the automaticity of response and replace unwholesome responses with wholesome ones. For example, one could

replace greed with concern for others or inattentiveness with alertness. This will bring better circumstances (good karma) in this and future lives. One can also let a moment of experience occur without responding to it at all, thereby letting the karmic seed that produced it be spent without planting a new seed. By this kind of meditation, after many lifetimes of practice, one can, perhaps, exit from the mind of the three poisons altogether.

Back to Dr. Seuss. The Grinch's first idea is to take away all the toys and sustenance of the *Whos,* not to follow the usual option of plying them with yet more objects, ideas, theories, and strategies. In religious terminology, this might be called *renunciation* or *purification*. In early Buddhism such an exit was described as entering *nirvana,* never to be reborn. Westerners tend to have little interest in lack of rebirth, and when Theravada Buddhism (the surviving representative of early Buddhism and the dominant form now in Southeast Asia) is taught in the West it is almost always from the point of view of leading a good life now.

In Mahayana Buddhism (Mahayana: Great Vehicle)

Buddhism evolved, and new forms incorporated and built on the earlier ones. One approach of later Buddhist teachers has been to treat the path to wisdom of an individual practitioner as retracing historical development – a useful conceit to use in this chapter. Mahayana Buddhism is estimated to have begun around 100 A.C.E. in India and

eventually spread throughout East Asia. It incorporated the foundational teachings and practices outlined earlier and to them added two new realizations to be discovered by practitioners: emptiness (*shunyata*) and compassion (*karuna)*. (For more material on the Mahayana Buddhism to be discussed in this section see Nhat Hanh, 1987; Rosch, 2010; Shantideva, 1995; Sprung, 1979; Suzuki, 1970; Trungpa, 1993)

Shunyata: The Great Clearing

Because shunyata is usually presented by means of negations, it is slippery to talk about. One thing it has been confused with though history that it clearly is **not** is nihilism. Experiences of existential angst, nausea, meaninglessness, and a cold empty universe are not shunyata under any of its Buddhist meanings. Instead they are interpreted as ego states, conceptual-emotional fantasies about emptiness, the ego's fear of the unknown perhaps or of losing its ground. Under shunyata, things may not exist in the way that we ordinarily think of them, but the texts state very clearly that emptiness does not mean that nothing exists.

Here are some of the main insights to which shunyata is said to point:

1) Shunyata as interdependence. Things do not have a self-nature but arise interdependently with everything else. An inner example is the subject and object of perception. At this moment, you

as the one who is reading this sentence, the sentence as the object being read, and the relationship between the two of you all arise interdependently not separately. (Remember that we are talking about experience of the phenomenal world as it arises and passes away moment by moment.) An outer example of interdependence -- and a vividly important one currently -- is money. Money literally has no self-nature, but exists through interdependence; that's why it is so tricky.

Note the expansion of the approach to causality here. Children begin by seeking a billiard-ball-hitting-billiard-ball level of local causality (Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 2001), and most adults never grow out of that. But that's not the kind of world we live in or the kind of vision needed to cope with that world -- as CEOs, environmentalists, and government leaders ignore at their peril (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004). Minds capable of tuning into interdependence are needed in society.

2) Shunyata as sudden release. Ever had the following experience? Something is really bothering you; then suddenly you see a clever cartoon about that very topic; you laugh, and ah! -- relaxation, ease, all gone, at least for a few moments. Actually each moment releases that way if one looks.

3) Shunyata as Great Doubt. This does not mean a small, cramped, worried doubt about a particular thing, but a vast "seeing through" of conceptual and emotional constructions as a whole – a

clearing. Remember the Grinch? He clears out every last thing from the *Whos'* houses: toys, Christmas tree, food. He has to. That's part of it, the first step forward.

4) Shunyata as no-mind or don't-know-mind. Deeper than not knowing the answer to a question -- though that could be an entry into it.

5) Shunyata as completely open mind. What more can be said about this one?

There are a variety of Mahayana practices aimed at provoking shunyata insights: a) In formless meditations, an awareness may be encouraged that is more expanded and environmental than the pointillist mindfulness favored in earlier practices. The analogy is made to seeing words in their context of sentences and in the whole text rather than in isolation; one is still seeing the individual words but in an expanded field. b) Various meditations and contemplations can be taught to awaken the ability to tune into the interdependence of the world. The Vietnamese Zen teacher, activist, and poet Thich Nhat Hanh holds up a piece of paper and talks of all the things that are in this paper. The sun is in the paper, because, without it, the tree from which the paper was made could not have grown; the father of the logger who cut down the tree is in the paper…you see where this logic is leading. c) Practices with specific forms are also used to provoke an open mind: argument, koans, "Dharma combat," and many others.

Note the qualitative difference between these teachings and the earlier ones. We are beginning to hear about alternatives to samsara and how to find the mind (or *no-mind*) beyond the prison. But shunyata is only half of the story.

Compassion

When the *Whos* awaken Christmas morning with everything gone, the Grinch listens for their lament, and receives a "shocking surprise." The *Whos* are singing nonetheless.

That first flash of the open mind of shunyata is also a flash of open heart. It manifests as feelings along the human warmth dimension: e.g. as compassion, friendliness, empathy, love, sympathy, caring, and so on. This is another way in which shunyata is not nihilism; it is understood to be inseparable from compassion "like the two wings of a bird." Such feelings and the compassionate actions that flow from them differ from similar appearing behavior in human realm in that, united with the vast mind of shunyata, the actions are not based on the business deal mentality of what-will-I-get-out-of-this, but on the interdependent wisdom of what truly needs to be done in this moment. In fact, Mahayana practitioners take Bodhisattva vows not to go off into nirvana, but to be reborn in life after life in order to be of benefit to other sentient beings.

There are a variety of practices to arouse the mind of compassion. The simplest (based on a Theravada loving kindness

meditation) is to wish good things for people: for example, health, peacefulness, happiness, or wisdom. Traditionally this would be done first for oneself, then a loved one, friend, neutral, and finally an enemy. A more challenging form of this (*tonglen*) is to breathe in the bad as well as to send out the good. Another practice is to imagine one's ordinary life activities as benefiting the world as well as oneself. For example, imagine that reading this book on personal wisdom will help others to become wiser, or that by doing your morning exercises (if you have such) you are helping to harmonize the energy of the world.

There are six specific Mahayana virtues called the Six *Paramitas* meaning those activities that take you out of the prison of samsara and "to the other shore." These are: generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and wisdom. Again they are meant to differ from their samsaric counterparts in that ideally they would be practiced as transcendent virtues arising from the mind of shunyata and compassion rather than from the strategies of the mind of samsara. Of course, in reality people do the best they can. For example, there is a Mahayana wedding ceremony in which the bride and groom, sometimes blushing or laughing, offer each other objects representing each of the paramitas vowing to practice them in their marriage.

In some later Mahayana schools, amongst them most Zen, the basic nature is referred to using somewhat positive terms, for example, Buddha nature (*tathagatagarbha)* which might then be described as

"empty of samsara but filled with wisdom" (Hookham, 1991). They also begin to speak explicitly of what is beyond the mind of samsara as a source of personal actions. *Non-action* in Zen doesn't mean becoming a couch potato but acting from the wisdom of *no-mind*.

Lets take stock of the journey so far. First by looking closely at experience, the practitioner comes to see the prison that his mind inhabits and becomes motivated to put that behind him (*renunciation*) and to seek something else. As his awareness deepens and expands, he "sees through" the supposedly solid, fixed nature of the prison, and with awakened compassion and the skillful means of Mahayana practices begins life as an aspiring Bodhisattva healer of those still imprisoned. But there is more to come regarding the nature of the prison and its alternatives.

In Vajrayana Buddhism

> And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
> Stood puzzling and puzzling: "How *could* it be so?
> "It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
> "It came without packages, boxes or bags!"
> And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.
> *Then* the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
> "Maybe Christmas," he thought, "*doesn't* come from a store.
> "Maybe Christmas…perhaps…means a little bit more!" (Seuss, 1957, unpaginated)

The Vajrayana (Diamond Vehicle) began circa 800 A.C.E. in India. Early forms of it moved into China and Japan, later ones to Tibet. Because it is the Tibetan forms that are known and practiced in the West, I will limit discussion to those. As with Mahayana, Vajrayana

incorporates teachings that came before it, adding two basic realizations and a cornucopia of skillful means (i.e. practices) to accomplish these. (For more material on Vajrayana to be discussed in this section see Freemantle, 2001; Ponlop, 2003; Rosch 2008, 2010; Snellgrove, 1987; Sogyal, 1992; Trungpa, 1991; Tsoknyi, 1998).

1) *The natural primordial state (the essence).* There is a primordial state that is all-good, pure, and complete. It is beyond our mind, not created/fabricated by our mind. From that radiates the phenomenal world of experience. This is viewed as knowable by natural awareness, thus statements, such as the above, are considered pointers to it, rather than doctrines.

2) *The phenomenal world as wisdom (the nature)*. Samsara and the entire world that we experience actually consist of the wisdom energies of that radiance. We misunderstand and distort them, but we can wake up to their true nature. In light of this, the whole thing -- including experiences of passion, aggression, ignorance, frustration, loss, sadness, suffering, imprisonment, peace, liberation and all the rest – all of it is sacred. When a person can rest in such awareness and come from that place in action, that is true personal wisdom and with it the aspiring Vajrayana bodhisattva gains the power that can move mountains. We can now see how contemplative teachings that at face value might seem abstract or beyond the personal can actually function as intimate (“closer than one’s heart”) personally known wisdom.

3) Skillful means to accomplish all this

If it's all so good and so potent, why do people avoid it? The answer given is that it is too open, vast, timeless, direct, and brilliantly luminous. People prefer the dull cocoon of the habitual mind of oneself. Therefore much teaching, transmission, and practices are needed – not to add something new but to get people to relax into the basic nature they have been all along.

The role of the Vajrayana teacher (the *lama*) is to act as a conduit for the primordial state and its radiance. The lama gives mind-to-mind transmissions both of deep and of more specific wisdoms. Yes, there does appear to be such a thing, and large numbers of Western students of Tibetan teachers diligently stick to their practices motivated by the glimpses of more enlightened states intermittently provided by one or another of these transmissions. But if such were possible, wouldn't one expect extra sensory perception (ESP) experiments to work? Not necessarily: ESP experiments are looking at a qualitatively different kind of information in a different context with a different quality of mind than these kinds of transmissions (Rosch, 1999). The lama can also give empowerments (*wang*) of various wisdom energies both to the public at large as a general blessing or to his students to do specific practices to help them embody those energies.

The Vajrayana uses a variety of practices with form (called *cataphatic* in religious studies language). These practices are also

understood as conduits. This is a different orientation than normally taken in Western activities, including Western religions. For example, if you consider one purpose of sacred texts to be the transmission of wisdom beyond concepts, arguments about whether the texts are to be interpreted literally or metaphorically will seem peculiar and likely not worth killing people over. Many Vajrayana practices with form are *sadhanas*: that is, liturgies in which particular wisdom energies are visualized as deities with accompanying mantras and mudras (gestures). A specialty of the Vajrayana is that the arts, including narratives and the use of all one's senses, are also considered practices with form. In fact, done with the proper mind-set, all the activities of ordinary daily life, including the dreams and dreamless sleep of nightly life, are included as a path of living wisdom.

Vajrayana meditations without form are truly formless. One need do nothing as one sits, knowing each present moment as the fourth moment (*dus bzhi pa)*, timeless and sacred.

Note how we have come full circle; in early Buddhism the senses and the activities of ordinary lay life are considered dangerous because they can evoke the three poisons and further enmesh one in the prison of samsara. Now, seen with the eye of pure perception and sacred outlook (*dag snang*) all of that is none other than awake, living wisdom itself; the prison is the garden.

In Shambhala

Vajrayana Buddhism may be in the process of giving birth to a fourth path called Shambhala. Shambhala was founded by the Tibetan lama Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in the United States in the mid 1970s from *terma* (received texts), a Tibetan tradition in which texts that are particularly relevant to the circumstances of a specific time and place will appear when needed, usually in the mind stream of a suitable receiver. There are by now Shambhala Centers in major cities in the United States and Canada and in 62 countries altogether. They operate in an interesting conjunction, still being worked out, with the Vajrayana Buddhism from which they emerged. (For more information on the Shambhala material to be discussed in this section see Hayward & Hayward, 1998; Mipham, 2005; Trungpa, 1984, 2001)

Shambhala includes the Buddhist teachings that came before it as well as some teachings and practices from other traditions. It has three major teachings of its own.

1) Basic Goodness

Basic goodness is the foundation. In one sense it is a simpler way of speaking of the primordial all-good ground of Vajrayana. However, instead of being the final realization of a long and arduous path, it is boldly proclaimed as the beginning. Remember that this is goodness in experience itself of whatever kind whether gaining or losing, pleasure or pain, enlightenment or confusion, and so on.

2) Confidence beyond fear

Teachings on fear are a central theme in Shambhala. They follow a logical progression. This is an age of fear. When people are not in contact with basic goodness, anxiety and fear arise. People cover the fear with a cocoon of habits and actions. Beyond/below fear is the mind that is gentle and fearless. In Shambhala this is called the warrior's mind, warrior (*pawo*) meaning someone who is beyond aggression. Shambhala and Shambhala Buddhism emphasize practices to reach that mind.

3) Enlightened society

This is the teaching that most distinguishes Shambhala from previous Buddhism: an enlightened society is necessary as the container for and manifestation of personal paths to wisdom. Such a society is possible because the ways humans bond with each other and create society do not depend on the motives of samsara in order to function; in fact society will run much better if it is based on goodness rather than on ignorance, greed, fear, and aggression. Establishing an enlightened society is crucial at this juncture of human history because otherwise the world is headed into a dark age in which human civilization, if it survives at all, will be much diminished. Shambhala enlightened society would be secular and inclusive; it is there to serve and nourish other religions, not just Buddhism; likewise the arts and, in fact, all of human life.

Of course, this is not the first utopian vision: what are the details?

Actually it's a work in progress. Currently Shambhala practitioners are trying to figure out the nature of, as well as how to establish, a more enlightened culture and social structure within their own communities. So we can stay tuned.

We have reached the end and perhaps fruition of the long arc of development of the Buddhist understanding of personal wisdom. We end with human life contextualized within timeless basic goodness and the sacred world radiating from it. Practices focus on bringing enlightened energies -- such as deep wisdom, kindness, and fearlessness -- into oneself and out to the larger world. From the point of view of a mind in samsara, human realm is a prison of struggle, frustration, and suffering. But seen and practiced with the pure perception and sacred outlook of the fruition, the promise is that these very same human activities can be profound and brilliant.

Two closing notes on this: The first is from a commentary on Bellini's painting Saint Francis in the Desert, "The painting stuns with its conception of physical and spiritual vision as one and the same" (Schjeldahl, 2011, p19). And then what happens the moment after? Back to the Grinch:

> "And the minute his heart didn't feel quite so tight,
> He whizzed with his load through the bright morning light
> And he brought back the toys! And the food for the feast!
> (Seuss, 1957, unpaginated)

But it's a different feast now.

Science and Buddhist Wisdom: The Mindfulness Movement

Part of the mandate of this book was to include discussion of science. The last 30 years have witnessed the ever-expanding use of therapeutic interventions called *mindfulness* and a growth industry of research confirming their benefits and attempting to explain them. Since mindfulness was taken from Buddhist practices, there is a popular tendency to see the research as a forum on Buddhism or on meditation, but most researchers speak of mindfulness as a technique that, although originally a part of Buddhism, is now thankfully stripped of its "philosophy" and "metaphysics" and made scientific.

Research showing the health benefits of Eastern practices began in the 1960s with the mantra meditation of Transcendental Meditation (TM), followed shortly by a scientific re-interpretation of TM in terms of relaxation (Benson, 1975). In 1979 Jon Kabat-Zinn, then at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, tried out a new approach to help chronic pain patients who were otherwise falling through the cracks of the medical system. He put together a program of meditations, yoga, and other practices that he had been personally trying, called it Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and found it to be helpful for these otherwise very difficult patients (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Since then the use of mindfulness in therapies has burgeoned as has research showing its benefits for a variety of physical and psychological ills as well as for ordinary people without specific clinical diagnoses (Baer, 2006; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Davidson &

Begley, 2012; Didonna, 2009; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). For purposes of this chapter, what we need to ask is: What is it that is being taught under the label *mindfulness?* How is it being measured? And how might it be relevant, if it is, for the present discussion of personal wisdom in Buddhism?

What is mindfulness in therapeutic use?

The pop culture version of mindfulness is "just be in the present moment" (or just pay attention to it). But if you tell a troubled person to just pay attention to what is happening in the present moment, likely all he will see is how bad he feels. And a less troubled person will probably get quickly bored -- e.g. what's so exciting about brushing your teeth? This is why people do not pay attention in the first place. The mind of samsara doesn't find the present moment either healing or entertaining; it finds it groundless and disconfirming of the fantasy self, and it flees from it. If instead you use Kabat-Zinn's much cited instruction to pay attention to the present moment without judgment, your troubled or less troubled person cannot do that either because our ordinary mind operates by means of continual judgments. (For example, a research instrument called the *semantic differential* has found, across languages, that the foremost connotative meaning on which words are rated is the good-bad dimension – Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1967). With closer attention to their thoughts, what people see first is the presence of judgment not its absence -- as Kabat-

Zinn now readily admits in interviews. In short, there is a tendency in both the research and therapeutic communities to think and write about mindfulness as though it were a simple mechanical technique without context that can be administered like a pill. Not so: there has to be an extensive context of teachings and practices to entice, push, and inspire a reluctant mind into a state where it is willing and able to abide, even be nourished, in the present. Such personal wisdom developing contexts are in fact included, though largely unacknowledged, within the clinical and other mindfulness settings being researched.

Most studies on the clinical benefits of mindfulness that meet scientific standards (for example: proper control groups) have been done on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and its variants. (Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy is MBSR plus cognitive therapy – see Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Teasdale & Barnard, 1993). So let us look at what is actually in MBSR. It is an eight-week group program that contains not only sitting meditation using attention to an object (the breath, sensations, feelings, or thoughts) but also: a body scan; hatha yoga postures and/or qi gong exercises; eating three raisins (usually presented as a sensory heightening exercise); working on participants' attitudes (MBSR leaders insert many things here such as not judging, patience, self trust, non-striving, acceptance, letting go…); some communication training (as in Rosenberg 2003); many

teachings (lectures, readings, poetry…); interaction with the MBSR leader; a touch of the guru principle (audio tapes of Kabat-Zinn and perhaps others); group discussion and support; homework assignments; pointed analysis of one's habits and emotions in daily life, and discussion and exercises in attention and making choices in daily life. This is anything but a simple technique; it's more like a mini-retreat program.

The MBSR leader's depth of understanding of meditation, mindfulness, minds, people, and all related topics plays a crucial role. After the initial successes of MBSR, Kabat-Zinn generously exported a detailed guide to the program to interested hospitals and clinics. There it was administered by whatever personnel were available, people without necessarily any background. An important fact that is normally overlooked is that, under those conditions, MBSR simply did not work. Initial attempts at Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy also did not work; the founders had to first come to Kabat-Zinn for training. Although Kabat-Zinn has long since established prerequisites and training requirements for those who will be leading official MBSR groups, there is much variation in how it is led depending upon the background of the leader. There is more variation yet among teachers of the unofficial offshoots of MBSR. Leading a group like MBSR is a task that draws forth everything that the leader has. Leaders may be from any of the forms of Buddhism; they may be therapists; they might be

members of one of the Western religions; they may be veterans of one or more new age groups; they may begin with no background in any of this and receive all their training from Kabat-Zinn. All of this will come into play. It will most likely not be explicit; for example, therapists know they are not doing group therapy in this context, and Buddhist practitioners know they are not presenting Buddhist teachings, many of which are sufficiently contrary to the desires of the samsaric mind that they can easily increase, rather than decrease, stress in the short term. But the overall effect is that what they are transmitting to participants is not simple technique but wisdom, just enough of it to influence participants attitudes, minds, and hearts in a direction that makes being present with their experience less aversive and more positive.

The role of contextual support is even more apparent in two other systems of therapy credited with using mindfulness but that do not explicitly teach meditation. In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 1999), patients commit themselves to goals and behaviors in a manner much like taking vows in Buddhism and the Western religions. In Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT; Lineham, 1993a, b), patients are guided toward the part of their mind that is neither intellect nor emotion. DBT thus has the most explicit depth dimension of any of the therapies.

All of the mindfulness research cited so far has been with adults, but there is also a rich new field of mindfulness training with children.

This work is being done, even with quite young children, both in classroom settings and at home in conjunction with training for their parents (Rosch, 2008; Saltzman & Goldin, 2011; Wall 2005). Such work is of particular interest for the argument of this chapter, since it is obvious to trainers and researchers alike that it takes far more than a simple technique to communicate being present in a meaningful way to a child. The resultant array of imaginative exercises, visualizations, and mindfulness games should be of interest to anyone concerned with education (for example Greenland, 2010; Saltzman & Goldin, 2011; Willard, 2010). The outcome of such trainings is typically measured, not only by self-report from the child, but also by ratings of changes in the child's behavior by teachers and/or parents, converging operations that are rare in adult studies. In addition, perhaps partly because of its practical orientation, mindfulness work with children is often combined with exercises for the development of empathy and compassion, just as it is in Buddhism (Gordon, 2005; Greenland, 2010; Hanh, Nghiem & Vriezen, 2011). A good source for learning about all of this work with children, most of which is currently in progress rather than completed, is through the relevant websites (Association for Mindfulness in Education: http://www.mindfuleducation.org; Bright Light Foundation: http://www.brightlightfoundation.net/projects_S_Ele.htmll; Inner Kids: http://www.innerkids.org; Mindfulness in Education Network: http://www.mindfuled.org;

The Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education: http://www.dalailamacenter; The Still Quiet Place: http://www.stillquietplace.com).

Mindfulness in therapeutic interventions is not the only kind of research suggesting there may be something measurable in Buddhist wisdom. There is research on long term meditators, the most striking of which comes from the laboratory of Richard Davidson (Davidson, 2002; Davidson & Begley, 2012). Through a lifetime of careful experimentation, Davidson had previously shown the association of a certain kind of positive affect with increased activation of areas of the left prefrontal cortex. This region of the brain was hyper activated, beyond anything he had seen before, in a small sample of Tibetan Buddhist monks. Davidson also found that compassionate thoughts triggered this area of positive emotion in the monks (one in particular) but not in American student research subjects.

Finally, we might recall that the discussion of the Buddhist path was initiated as an example of the innovative potentials of contemplative wisdom. Contemplative paths in Western religions, just as in Eastern, are based on personal practices and experience. That is one reason why such paths in Judaism, Christianity and Islam have long histories of strained relations with their parent religions. However, there is growing interest among Westerners in reclaiming contemplative and meditative aspects of their own Western religions. Examples are

Centering Prayer within Christianity (Bourgeault, 2004; Keating, 1996; Pennington, 1982), Jewish meditation within the Jewish renewal movement (Gefen, 1999; Kaplan, 1985), and the enthusiasm of some Westerners for Sufism within Islam (Douglas-Klotz, 2005; Geaves, 2000; Rosch, 2008). There is also a growing body of research on the physical and mental health benefits of contemplative prayer, both in its religious and in some secularized contexts (Pargament, 2011; Plante, 2008, 2010; Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005, 2008), as well as a nascent interest in relationships between contemplative prayer and mindfulness (Stratton, 2011). Bringing the research on mindfulness back to the context of contemplative practices as a whole might help serve as a corrective to some of the blind spots in the study of mindfulness.

The Measurement of Mindfulness

The previous section dealt with problematic issues in the way mindfulness is assumed to be a simple technique that can be excised from its wisdom context, an assumption that runs counter to the way in which mindfulness is actually taught in the contexts in which the research on its benefits has been performed. These issues again surface in the way mindfulness is measured. There are presently five mindfulness self report scales in general use (for an excellent summary and review of their psychometric properties, see Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). However, none of these scales measure either the fine-grained observation of experience that underlies the

beginning of insight in Buddhism or the penetrating and expansive awareness that forms the basis for its later teachings (Rosch 2007).

What are the scales measuring? As Baer et al (2006) have shown, the scales as a whole decompose into five separate facets (subscales). Only one of these concerns attention as such, and the actual items that comprise that facet (Rosch, 2007), show that what it is measuring is the extent to which a person is or is not so spaced out as to be dysfunctional. Three other facets measure factors of general psychological well-being or its lack that would be familiar in any clinical system: moderation in emotions, moderation in self criticism, and the ability to label and describe with words. All four of these facets correlate with each other. There is a possible fifth facet composed of items in only two of the scales that a rater could potentially interpret as referring to close observation, but, interestingly, this facet does not correlate with the others for non-meditators. Such a finding likely demonstrates the fact, well known to teachers of Buddhist meditation, that without training, people simply don't know what is going on in their minds and cannot answer such questions. For example, a depressed or compulsive person in the throws of his emotions may think he is closely observing when he is actually swimming in repetitious fantasies. Paradoxically, someone who is already somewhat mindful and aware may rate himself low on this dimension because he is aware of his many lapses. The whole area of measurement of mindfulness needs

serious re-thinking.

But the existing mindfulness scales get research results; what is happening? I believe that what the scales are measuring is what psychology knows how to measure: a cluster of variables defining good mental adjustment in our culture. Naturally they correlate with each other and with other measures of health versus pathology. What is new is the finding that not being seriously spaced out is one of those variables. This is a valuable addition to clinical knowledge -- though note that there is no evidence that it is the primary or originating factor. What these scales cannot measure is the distinction between someone who is just in contact enough with his environment to be functional and someone who is actually developing the Buddhist style mindfulness/awareness that trainings such as MBSR purport to be developing. In Buddhist terms, the scales might be considered a measure of the extent to which a person spends time in human realm rather than in a hellish, hungry ghost or any of the other alternative possible mindsets. So we are back where we started with human realm definitions of wisdom, with all of their inadequacies, that this chapter has attempted to elucidate.

Psychological Explanations of Mindfulness

Nowhere is this tension more manifest than in the explanations of mindfulness and its clinical benefits offered by psychological researchers (for example see Martin & Erber, 2007, whole issue).

These generally consist of first providing a respectable psychological name, such as *emotional regulation,* for mindfulness effects followed by an inclusive and well-reasoned treatise on the research and theory supporting that name as an important psychological variable. If one wonders about that variable's connection to mindfulness, one finds, somewhere in the article or book, usually in the introduction, a statement of the need to rid mindfulness of the philosophical, metaphysical or mystical baggage that it might bring from its origins. Providing already existing psychological constructs is a way to cleanse mindfulness and make it scientific. Such explanations are exorcisms, not science.

This is a deep problem. Contemporary psychologists, flush with new research technology such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of the brain, tend to assume their activities philosophy free. What they overlook is the powerful and pervasive metaphysics of their field, namely reductionist materialism (and within that usually the sub-sect we could call *brainism)*. What is most disturbing about this is the assumption that our present experimental psychology knows all we need to know and that any new phenomenon must be explained by the constructs already within its boundaries. How are we going to learn anything new that way? Where is the open, questioning mind that science is supposed to foster (and that drew me, personally, to science in the first place)? Could any scientist with knowledge of history

conscionably believe that the understanding of our sciences, as those sciences are at this moment in time, will remain immutably fixed?

There are, in fact, experiences on the Buddhist path that vividly illuminate our metaphysics as only that. Even a glimpse of the Great Doubt or open mind of shunyata makes practitioners quite sensitive to such matters. Other phenomena challenge our localized view of mind. Tibetan lamas, as already noted, give mind-to-mind transmission of wisdom states. Furthermore, at death, high lamas enter what is called *death samadhi*, a state that can last for days or longer. Though the lama is clearly clinically dead (no brain activity, no vital signs, body starting to decay), his heart center will remain slightly warm, and he emanates even more powerful mind transmissions than when alive (Rosch, 1999). Once present for such an event, people do not blindly accept psychology's assumptions about the nature of human minds.

Concluding Remark

> "…in *Who*-ville they say
> That the Grinch's small heart
> Grew three sizes that day!" (Seuss, 1957, unpaginated)

Wisdom is not small. It is not a plaything. It should not be studied like the proverbial drunk looking for his key under the street light even though he dropped it in the bushes because he can see better under the light. It may be precisely those aspects of wisdom, Buddhist or otherwise, that go beyond our scientific boxes and even beyond our minds that have any hope of freeing us from foolishness

and of addressing the unsolvable problems of our times.

Figures

Figure 1: Samsara: The Wheel of Life

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